

*Public Accounts***HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES**TABLING OF CORRESPONDENCE WITH NATIONAL ADVISORY  
COUNCIL ON UREA FORMALDEHYDE FOAM INSULATION

**Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, after I met with the National Advisory Board on UFFI, I promised to table in the House a document containing a summary of the commitments we made at this meeting, which took place last weekend. Therefore, since I was unable to take part in the debate the other day on Bill C-109, I would like to take advantage of my first opportunity since then to table this exchange of correspondence, in both official languages.

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[English]

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

## CONCURRENCE IN FIRST REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE

**Mr. Bill Clarke (Vancouver Quadra)** moved that the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, presented to the House on Friday, July 18, 1980 be concurred in.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is somewhat of an historic debate today. I am sorry to see that the former chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston), has left the House because what I am going to say today and what others may contribute will be very important to the progress of the power which Parliament can exercise over the affairs of the country.

I say it is an historic debate because it is the first debate, in my ten years in this House, on a motion to concur in a report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. We have had many reports. In fact, during this session I have tabled 16 reports as chairman. Some have been concurred in without debate. Three were substantial reports containing specific recommendations. Some took the form of a housekeeping report where, unfortunately, we had to come back to the House for a motion and concurrence to cover some expenses—minor at that—of the committee in sending representatives to conferences in other parts of Canada.

It is also historic, Mr. Speaker, in that it gives an opportunity for this House to carry out a recommendation contained in a booklet called "Improving Accountability: Canadian Public Accounts Committees and Legislative Auditors". This was a study done by Mr. John J. Kelly and Hugh R. Hanson, sponsored by the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation of which the former Auditor General of Canada, Mr. J. J. MacDonell, is chairman. This report contains some 69 recommendations applying to public accounts committees, legislatures, etc., and I think it is important for this debate that I read recommendation No. 33, which is as follows:

Legislatures set aside time to debate the reports of public accounts committees at least annually.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, this will be the first of many debates on reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

I should also refer to the other changes which have occurred in the operation of the Public Accounts Committee over the ten years I have been a member of this House and that committee. In the early days the committee was very restricted in the research it could do. In fact, it did not even have a full-time research officer and members met with the chairman to determine what subjects would be followed. The committee then held its meetings and we took the Auditor General's report after it was referred to us because it was not an automatic procedure in those days; we had to wait for a reference from a minister in the House. Evidence was heard and eventually, toward the end of the session, the clerk of the committee sat down and wrote an extensive, if not exhaustive, report which touched on every aspect of the evidence heard by the committee. That report was tabled in the House and it contained no recommendations. It was never debated or, as far as I know, even acted upon.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the committee has two full-time research officers provided by the Library of Parliament. One of them is a chartered accountant who has served the committee long and well; the other is an economist who has served the committee for less time but just as well.

We examine each Auditor General's report now, Mr. Speaker, as soon as it is tabled in the House, because we have an automatic reference under the Standing Orders of this House. After consultation with the Auditor General we decide which parts of that report are going to be considered the most important and which will therefore be considered and examined in detail by the committee.

● (1510)

That is a very important step because the Auditor General has pointed out instances to the committee where his office has spent \$1 million worth of time conducting an audit and the results of that audit never get examined by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. That is not to say that the committee is not interested in things the Auditor General says. But it is obvious that the Auditor General's report is so extensive and the committee's time is so limited that we have to choose the highlights of the Auditor General's report. Because we cannot see it all, we have good research staff and we have a plan of action so we know what we are going to study and approximately when we are going to study it, we are in a position to make much more effective reports to the House of Commons.

It is interesting to note that the report we are debating today was tabled in the House on July 18, 1980, just over two years ago. The committee has considered that its reports should have some attention from the House. We have follow-up procedures so that if we do not get support from the government, then we